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Maria Bacardi: "Deseo"

SOURCE: [JAZZWAX BY MARC MYERS](#), Published: 2013-03-21

Cuban boleros are a specialty all to themselves. Performed well, they are languid ballads with stories illustrating love gone wrong. To be convincing, a bolero requires a voice with a humid, husky timbre and a feeling that neatly combines grief and guarded optimism. The greats always sound shattered by a lost love but hopeful that tomorrow will bring fresh happiness. Among the finest female practitioners of the Cuban bolero have been Olga Guillot, Omara Portuando, Graciela Perez Grillo and Maria Teresa Vera.



Now add Maria Bacardi to the list [Photo at top by Christine Newman]. The Cuban-born New Yorker's new album ***Deseo*** (or *Desire*) is perfect. Her voice is as lovely and confessional as it is emotionally pained and adrift. There's sheer honesty in her delivery that can only come from experience and listening carefully to those who came before her.

The band here is first-rate. Producer David Oquendo [pictured above] is a rare talent and one of my absolute favorite guitarists. He also has a terrific voice on boleros and son. When you hear him on this album, you'll know instantly what I mean. His passion and technique are extraordinary and from another era. I've been going to hear him play for the past 13 years—and I'm always struck by his soul, spirit and technique.

On her debut album, Bacardi takes on a dozen boleros—including the classic *Como Fue*, *Yellow Days* and *Interludio*. All are smoldering, moving and deeply sensual. Don't understand Spanish? Who cares. Neither do I. Trust me, you'll catch on fast enough. Bacardi here reminds us how broken hearts used to communicate when imaginations were required. [Pictured above: Maria Bacardi and David Oquendo, left, last summer in East Hampton, N.Y. Photo by Christine Newman]

JazzWax tracks: You'll find Maria Bacardi's *Deseo* (Breaking Records) [here](#).

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